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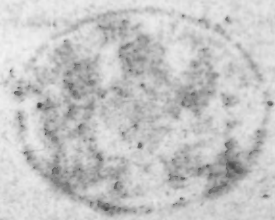
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MONTHLY REVIEW, *April*, 1798.



A

SERMON

ON THE

PRESERVATION

OF

INTEGRITY.

Bradford, 1820
Amos

By JAMES JOHNSON, Esq,

AUTHOR OF

"A SERIOUS ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND, &c."

London:

PRINTED FOR T. N. LONGMAN, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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PRINTED FOR T. BOWMAN, WATERLOO-STREET.

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SERMON, &c.

JOB xxvii. 5.

TILL I DIE, I WILL NOT REMOVE MY INTEGRITY FROM ME.

PATIENCE is the prevailing feature in the character of Job. Few men experienced more disastrous incidents; and few men supported themselves with more submissive resignation. Flourishing in prosperity and success, we behold him; in a moment, reduced to abject poverty. Blessed with the splendid appearance of domestic happiness, he sees, in luckless hour, all his fond hopes "laid in the dust." When

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messengers came, in repeated succession, to bear the doleful tidings of misfortune, we cannot too much admire his complacency of mind. "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; and said, naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

Satan's attack, from considerations of worldly interest, proved ineffectual to the accomplishment of his wishes. Not the lowest state of adversity could move Job's patient mind. The tempter thence proceeded to personal disease; and "smote him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown."—At such combination of afflictive incidents, what man is there, even of common sensibility, who doth not feel himself deeply affected? Who can contemplate on the inverted favours of Providence, but with sensations of generous pity?

pity? Whose heart is so insensible, as not to condole with the unhappy sufferer?—When we consider his answer to the sinful importunity of his wife, “to curse God, and die,” the dignity of his character rises to our view, with more conspicuous lustre. We feel, kindled in our bosom, love, blended with admiration: “Thou speakest,” says he, “as a foolish woman speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God; and shall we not also receive evil? As God liveth, all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedly, nor my tongue utter deceit: God forbid, that I should do this sin. Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.”

These sentiments furnish us with much instructive doctrine: of which I will confine myself to four points, as principally conveyed. They recommend the preservation of integrity. Under temptations; Under a prospect of danger;

ger; Under injuries and wrongs; Under distress and affliction.

First; Integrity should be preserved under temptations.—Man came originally from the hands of his Creator, formed with unspotted innocence. When, at the fall, sin entered into the world, the face of nature was changed. Human kind felt the shock in every part. A train of evils burst their coercive bands, and fled over every part of the habitable world: and, from enjoying the paradise of God, man sunk, in a moment, into a state of moral discipline. Under this state, in order to exercise the virtuous principles, inherent in the human breast, temptations were permitted to assail mankind. The necessity of temptation appears, to the eye of human reason, to be drawn from its final design; our improvement in piety and virtue, as the requisite attainment to future happiness. Allurements to what is wrong, difficulties in the discharge of our duty, our inability,

inability, without circumspective care, to pursue uniform integrity, and the opportunities, which we have, of rejecting what we dislike, or of obtaining, by unlawful means, what we desire, render the present world peculiarly adapted to a state of moral discipline.* For these causes, we are continued in life; and these consequences naturally follow a probationary state. Temptation is the divine process, to refine our nature, to discriminate the good from the bad, and to justify to human reason God's conduct, in condemning, to eternal misery, creatures, whom his goodness had called into life.

Riches afford the grand incentives to sin. They constantly lead men astray. They bestow the means of indulging licentious desires; and when men possess the means, the propriety of indulgence is, too often, disregarded. From this source, flows much of the misery, which

* See Butler's Analogy.

afflicts the human race. The possessors of this dubious and transitory good too often imagine, that they have acquired the liberty of acting, just as their inclinations may prompt them. Free from restraints of worldly policy, they consider themselves, proportionably free from restraints of moral obligation; and thus become exposed to the misery of a "reprobate mind."—The influence of riches is, however, not insuperable by the pious mind. For though our blessed Saviour affirms, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;" yet this declaration is understood not to preclude the opulent from this blissful state, but to imply only the extreme difficulty of their admission.—Spurn, then, with noble disdain, all servile compliance with the vices of a corrupt world; and assert the true honour of man. Though temptation to do evil assail you with full force; yet encounter it with manly spirit. Exert the virtuous principle

ciple, within, and you will acquire strength. Persevere, and you will conquer.—“If iniquity be in thy hand, put it away; and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacle for ever.”

In the course of pursuit, such conduct auspices the most propitious events, and you will shine in the “midst of others, as lights in the world.”

But not riches, only, supply temptation to sin: poverty, also, exercises similar power. Affliction and distress have always been lamented, as bitter ingredients in human life; and have been produced, as justifying, or, extenuating pleas, on the commission of dishonesty. But, certainly, no reasonable man will contend, that poverty changes the nature of vice; or, establishes, as innocent, what is evidently sinful. The nature of sin is intrinsic and invariable. It depends not on external property. It is, as the Apostle defines it, “transgression of law.” In peculiar cases, indeed,

deed, it admits of palliation, as well as of aggravating circumstances; but that slight palliation, which deducts, only in small degree, from the criminality of the deed.—Let man, therefore, preserve his integrity in both states. When riches prompt him, on one hand, to deviate from upright conduct, or indigence, on the other, to defraud his neighbour, let him reason with himself: “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Do not the divine laws prohibit, not only sinful pursuits, but “all appearance of evil?” Shall I, then, knowingly violate God’s command? And for what? For the momentary gratification of an inordinate wish?—No!—“My heart shall not reproach me, as long as I live! I will keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing, which is right. For, then, I shall lift up my face without spot: yea, I shall be steadfast, and shall not fear.”—Train your minds to such reflections as these. Regulate the tenour of your life, by adhering closely to your duty. When allured by
tempta-

temptation in its most attractive form, fortify your minds with this pious resolution; "till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me." When you address the throne of Grace, to that part of your prayer, in which you deprecate evil, subjoin; "remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty, nor riches. Feed me with food, convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny thee; and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal; and take the name of my God in vain."

Let me recommend, secondly, the preservation of integrity, under a prospect of danger.—Contracted is the boundary of human sight. Future events, it is impossible for man to ascertain. Hence we must, inevitably, be exposed to danger. But it remains uncertain, that we shall feel mournful effects from our unguarded state. The black cloud, which portends storm, may discharge its violence in some other region; or, may be dispelled by the agency of other

other powers. Shall we, then, shall reasonable men, resign our integrity, at the bare apprehension of evils? Shall we, like dastardly soldiers, flee, at the bare sight of our adversary: or, like bold and sturdy champions, brave the combat, and repel the foe?—To avoid the contest, and to resign our Christian arms, betrays baseness of spirit. Future imaginary events may, or, may not occur. A thousand incidents may intervene to stop their progress. A thousand incidents they have to surmount, before they can touch the point, on which we stand. But, should the anticipated evil take place, we experience only, what thousands, every day, experience; that human life is a variegated scene of comfort and trouble. Should the evil not take place, we flee from a shadow. We resign our integrity for an illusion of happiness, which inflicts much real misery. Recollect the offence, committed, not only against your conscience, but also against your God.—Let the timid Christian, then, suppress immoderate anxiety.

iety. Implant in your breast resolute firmness; instead of that mean pusillanimity, which degrades your character. Be mindful to perform your duty, and leave the event to God. "The wicked flee, when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold, as lions."

The next material point, in which, by the text, we are instructed, is, preservation of integrity, under reproaches, injuries, and wrongs. To these, all are exposed. No station is so exalted, no rank of life, so humble, as to exempt men from feeling the virulent attacks of envy, malice, and personal hatred.* The meek and lowly suffer from the daring and violent. The meritorious, from artful insinuation, or the open attacks of calumny. Unable, himself, to attain honorary distinction, the slanderer must, needs, reduce all upon a level. He meanly deranges the laurels of those, whom superior abilities, or commendable industry, have raised

* See Blair's Sermons.

to more elevated rank. Christianity is injured by the insolence of the scoffer. He, who shews any marks of true piety, is branded with the opprobrious name of hypocrite. There is no character, so unblemished, as not to have been wounded, in some degree, and at some time, by malicious traduction. There is no man, so upright, as to be exempted from injuries and wrongs.—Flatter not yourselves, then, that you shall be excluded from the common lot of man. If you cannot support yourselves under them with becoming fortitude, withdraw from public life. Retire to some sequestered spot, where you will find no human society to poison happiness: for in the midst of social intercourse, “it must needs be, that offences come.”*—But the only proper support under these afflictive attacks, is not the dereliction, but the preservation of integrity. Do you suppose, that, by sacrificing your virtue, you shall be free from injurious treatment?—You are greatly deceived

* See Blair's Sermons.

in your opinion of mankind. Reproaches will, then, justly fall on you from every quarter. You have no mental resource, to which you can flee. By losing your integrity, you have lost all, which is valuable in life—"The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."——Establish, therefore, virtuous principles in your conduct. Never swerve from integrity. Look down upon the petty attacks of malicious reproach, or of envious traduction, with unshaken nobleness of mind. Like a stately edifice on the summit of a mount, endure the hurricane, with manly composure. Let the votary of dissipation endeavour, in vain, to move your rigid virtue. "Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left;" but persevere through life, in firm adherence to religious duty.

Lastly; let us preserve our integrity, under distress and affliction.—Distress and affliction are

the allotted portion of man. They flow from a fountain, of which all have drunk. They accompany us, in every stage of life. Youth, manhood, and old age, have, each, their several shares. They are the salt, which season life. Like medicines, which operate to the restoration of bodily strength, they recall our dying virtue to light and life. Amidst the confusion of human affairs, the political schemes of the man of business, the turbulent scenes of faction, and the licentious pursuits of the dissipated, all sense of religion is lost. Distress steps in, seasonably, to its relief; and informs mankind, that shallow is all human policy; fugitive, all human enjoyment. It recalls men to serious consideration. It impresses them, if they are capable of impression, with religious sentiments. It trains the mind, gradually, to the habit of virtue; and fixes the principles of lasting peace. —Such is the operation of distress!— Should we, then, complain, that wretched is our lot; and that to none, but to us, did such combi-

combination of afflictive incidents ever occur? Should we complain, that we are singularly unfortunate; and so quickly yield ourselves victims to desponding melancholy, or to thoughtless indifference?—Console your drooping heart. Cast an exploring eye around, and tell me; Where, among the sons of men, can you behold unalloyed happiness? Into whose mansion have misfortunes not entered? Why, then, resign yourself a prey to despair? Why, resign your integrity, and forget your God, when you most need his assistance? Are the great laws of the universe to be suspended in their operation, to gratify the caprice of a worthless individual?—Vain man! Upon what grounds of reason, can you expect such indulgence? Upon what grounds of reason, can you expect exemption from the human lot? If you may claim it, why may not another; and with equal propriety all men upon the same plea?—Be satisfied; be contented with your doom. Cease your unjust complaints! Cease to wound the ear of the
 Almighty,

Almighty, with your sinful murmurs! "Who knoweth, what is good for man, in this life?" Presumest thou to impeach the equity of his decrees, because they correspond not with thy imperfect conception of human felicity? Presumest thou to condemn acts of incomprehensible wisdom?—Such impious folly only destroyeth thy peace of mind, and imposeth on thy shoulders an additional load of guilt. Thou offendest thy God, and makest thyself wretched.

If, to sinful complaints, we subjoin sinful pursuits, our guilt will receive a blacker stain. Under every view, sin is an aggravation of misery. It may, perhaps, sometimes procrastinate evil; but can never, totally, remove it. Super-added to external affliction, you feel all the horrors of inward remorse. By an upright mind the blows of adversity are hardly felt. But the man, whose soul is discomposed by acts of violence and oppression, who feels a convictive

tive sense of merited punishment, misfortune bends to the earth. Misery is the natural attendant on guilt. Corporal pain may be endured by a man of moderate fortitude; but a "wounded spirit, who can bear?"—Under distress, remember the consolations, associated with virtue. Remember, that God, who is the friend of integrity, presides over human affairs, and directs the threatening storm. Pointing our view towards "that irresistible arm, which is stretched over our heads;" let us be temperate, submit, and adore. Let us not insult that Deity, whose comprehensive sight includes all things, past, present, and future; and whose goodness will make all things operate, eventually, to our welfare. Brightness may soon emerge from the dark cloud: or, perhaps, the present melancholy appearance may be, but the gloomy avenue to some delightful scene.—By such a line of conduct, you will be enabled to look up to that God, whom you have worshiped, and to say; "I know, in whom I have trusted.

trusted. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me."

Bear also in mind, that, considered under the most deplorable view, distress will be but short. The moment may not be far remote, when you must bid adieu to the world, its vanities, its follies, and its afflictions. Troops of successive pilgrims daily flock on the stage of life, sparkle for an hour, and then disappear for ever. Where, now, are the lively companions of our youth; or, the friendly associates of advanced years? Where, now, are the once famed votaries of ambition, and the heroes of war?—Alas! The greater part of them are gone. "They are swept from the earth, as though they had never been. The wind hath passed over them;" and they are gone.—The grave lies before you, in formidable view. The shades of your departed friends rise in awful majesty, and beckon towards
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the gloomy mansion. There, is the long, long home of all flesh. There, we must all lie, in one common tomb. Sooner, or later, all you, around me, must go the same dismal road. Perhaps, this night the solemn mandate may be issued. Then, no more shall we hear the voice of melody, or, behold the light of the sun. No more shall we behold the cheerful face of nature, and of those dear friends, with whom we have trodden the paths of life.—Full of anxious fear, we shall all go to that unknown region, from whose bourn no traveller returned. What our fate may be there, God only knows. But what, at the dying moment, can dispel this fear, what can tranquillize our mind, but the preservation of integrity?—Look up then, thou, that art buried in misery, look up, with fearless trust! Though forgotten and despised by every friend on earth, you are remembered and protected by a powerful friend in Heaven. That sigh, which is heaved from your afflicted bosom, that tear, which drops

from your overflowing eye, unnoticed by the world, pass not unobserved by God.—Let hope then cheer your benighted soul. Though dark and forlorn, the prospect, the “sun of righteousness” and joy may diffuse his beams over the present melancholy scene. Though you eat the scanty morsel in sorrow and bitterness of heart, though you lie in some homely hut, on a bed of straw, humbled in sackcloth and ashes, or, exposed on the barren heath to the piercing wind of a cold, dreary night, consider, that you are under the guardian care of an Almighty Friend. That potent arm, which hurls on this terrestrial globe, and the whole planetary world, in regular course, is stretched over your head, as a defence. That Majesty, at whose word kingdoms rise and fall, looks down with merciful eye on the innocent sufferer.—Cheer, then, your desponding mind. Assume the firmness of a man. Supported by integrity, like the fabric, “founded on rock,” defy the powerless attacks of misfortune. Persevere in such conduct,

duct, be faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life.

Let these sentiments be engraven on your mind; and, when exposed to temptation and to danger, when you suffer reproaches, injuries, and wrongs, when you feel distress and affliction, remember, that they are the common lot of humanity; and exclaim, with the firm ardour of a man, and with the lively hopes of a Christian, "till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me."

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T. M. 1. 2.